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24. OCCURRENCE OF *TETRAODON TRAVANCORICUS* (HORA AND NAIR) IN THE CHALAKUDY, PERIYAR AND KECHERY RIVERS, KERALA

Malabar puffer fish (*Tetraodon travancoricus*) is a small species of less than 3 cm total length. Hora and Nair (1941) reported this species from Pamba river, Kerala. After a long period, this species was reported again from inundated brickyards at Pudukkad, Trichur, Kerala (Inasu 1993). Apart from these observations, there was no report on this fish from other rivers in Kerala.

Distinguishing Characters: D 7-8; A 8; P 16-18

T. travancoricus is characterised by an oblong and laterally compressed body; arched dorsal profile, highest at the middle of back; flat inter-orbital space; terminal mouth that is directed forward; nostril a hollow tube, nearly as high as wide, only its distalmost part formed into two very small lobes which are bent inwards, giving a key-hole appearance to the nares.

Remarks: Specimens were collected from Kanakkankadavu area of Chalakudy river, Thattakad and Kalady regions of Periyar river and Puzhakkal area of Kechery river, and this is the first report of the species. This species was not reported by earlier studies conducted in the Chalakudy and Kechery rivers (Thobias 1973, Antony 1973 and Inasu 1991).

In a study on the sexual dimorphism, Inasu (1993) reports, all the males of this species should

have a dark bluish ventral band from mouth to the caudal region. However, we observed that the number of males with the above mentioned character were less than the female specimens. Out of the 56 specimens collected from Chalakudy river, only four specimens appeared male. Furthermore, it appeared in large groups, occasionally in hundreds, observed mainly during the summer months (January to May) and very rarely during the rainy season. Local fishermen consider this fish as "frog tadpoles". The present report extends its distribution to three more rivers in Kerala.

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